



DATE:	20 March 2018	FOI REQUEST NO:	299_1718
<p>I'd like to submit the following under the Freedom of Information Act in relation to the latest fire stats on the Stats Wales website, which detail the number of call outs. They appear here - https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Community-Safety/Fire-Incidents/fires-specialserviceincidents-falsealarms-attended-by-fireandrescueservices-in-wales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can you give more information about false alarm calls – what are they mostly for eg automatic call outs to schools/hospitals when an alarm goes off etc? <p>The false alarm calls on the Stats Wales website are fire related false alarms. In the past three financial years: 67% of false alarms attended were due to automatic alarms 29% of calls were made with good intent 5% were malicious false alarms</p> <p>Of the automatic alarms attended 25% were in dwellings 19% were in hospitals 11% in educational establishments 11% in residential homes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- How much does each unnecessary call cost the service? <p>We do not calculate the cost of attending incidents so I am unable to provide the cost to the service.</p> <p>SWFRS' Unwanted Fire Signals Reduction Officer uses figures provided by Welsh Government's "Time for Action" document , which states "A recent report identified the unit cost of an unwanted fire signal (false alarm) as being around £300 per call."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- How long do they tie crews up for? <p>In the past three financial years crews spend an average of 23 minutes away from their station when called to a false alarm. More than one appliance may be called out to each incident.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What impact does attending false alarms have on the service? <p><i>"Responding to false alarms... incurs direct costs which are estimated to be around £3m per year in Wales, and opportunity costs by committing crews and appliances which could be used for other duties."</i> [Taken from "Time for Action" – Welsh Government. This figure relates to all three Welsh Fire and Rescue Services, not just to South Wales Fire and Rescue Service.]</p>			

Of the 17,315 incidents attended by South Wales Fire and Rescue Service in 2016/2017, 47% were false alarms. The effects of false alarms on the Fire and Rescue Service are:

- 1) Unnecessary risk to FRS responders and also to members of the public when FRS appliances are responding under emergency conditions.
- 2) Emergency resources are diverted, thus increasing the possibility of delays in attendance to genuine calls putting lives in danger and properties at risk.
- 3) Avoidable financial burden on public finances, particularly in respect of vehicle fleet costs (e.g. fuel, maintenance, etc.).
- 4) Erodes the confidence of employers who release their staff (i.e. Retained Duty System personnel) to attend incidents.
- 5) Disrupts essential work routines such as training and community safety activities.
- 6) Adverse impact on the environment - noise and Carbon Dioxide (CO2) emissions

[All Wales UFS Reduction Guidance]

In addition to the abovementioned effects upon the Fire and Rescue Service, false alarms can cause complacency, disruption, annoyance and cost to the economy.

A report produced by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) and Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire & Rescue Authority estimated that each false alarm cost a business approximately £2,900. If this figure were applied to false alarms in non-residential buildings which were caused due to equipment, it is estimated that the cost to businesses in Wales in 2013/14 alone was in the region of £28m [Time for Action – Welsh Government]

- Can you and do you claim the money back? If so how much have you claimed back in the past three years?

Fire and Rescue Services in Wales are not covered by the same elements of the Legislation which provide their English counterparts with the power to charge for attendance at false alarms. As such, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service has not claimed back any money for false alarms in the last three years.

- What can be done to reduce the numbers?

Note – An Unwanted Fire Signal, or UFS, is a false alarm attended by the Fire and Rescue Service, which was caused by an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA).

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (The Service) has implemented a UFS Reduction strategy aimed at reducing:

- the number of false alarms occurring in premises;
- the number of false alarms transmitted to The Service; and
- the risks and costs associated with the false alarms received by The Service.

The strategy aims to achieve this through numerous initiatives including:

- inclusion of '*Total false alarms attended*' as a statistic in the Strategic Plan 2017-2022 document and Improvement Plan 2017/2018 document (Target for 2017-2018 set at 7,800);
- introduction of UFS Reduction as an objective on the Community Risk Management Plans of individual Fire Stations;
- engagement at executive level with Health Boards, Education Authorities, Housing Associations and Local Authorities;
- collaboration with NHS Shared Services to monitor performance of healthcare sites and encourage UFS reduction activities such as replacement of obsolete alarm systems;
- "embedding" of a Business Fire Safety officer within University Hospital of Wales and the Royal Gwent Hospital to identify ways of reducing false alarms;
- engagement with the National Fire Chiefs' Council's Unwanted Fire Signals Working Group to identify best practice;
- provision of monitoring software for individual Station Commanders to identify main sources of Unwanted Fire Signals (UFS) in their areas;
- engagement with individual premises (including telephone calls, letters, emails and inspections following UFS) aimed at raising awareness of the costs and risks associated with UFS;
- call-challenging by Control Room operators to identify the cause of an alarm at an early stage, reducing the chance of unnecessary mobilisations;
- delivery of training to key staff at healthcare premises, aimed at raising awareness of the risks associated with UFS, how to reduce their occurrence, and how to contact The Service to effect a timely "stand-down" of resources;
- reduction in the level of resources mobilised to Automatic Fire Alarms during daytime hours when premises are likely to be fully-staffed and actual fires are more likely to be discovered and reported;
- analysis of internal statistics to identify problem areas and trends;
- awareness-raising project to educate the public (via internet and radio) of the need to reduce false alarms and what to do in the event of a false alarm;
- production of educational materials for fire crews to hand-out to site personnel whilst attending false alarms;
- introduction of training materials so crews are fully aware of the risks and costs associated with UFS and of the preventative measures available; and
- creation of a temporary UFS Reduction Officer post to coordinate the above work.